

## **Student Perspectives on Transfer and Articulation: Implications for Teacher Education Pedagogy and Practice**

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*This study introduces students' perspectives into the knowledge base on community college teacher education and transfer to the four-year college. There is currently widespread agreement that community colleges are an essential resource for diversifying the teaching force and improving teacher retention. While data on enrollment, alignment, and credentialing abound; however, students' own accounts of the factors that enhance or obstruct their training and transfer are absent from the literature. This research presents the findings of an interview study conducted with 20 urban community college education majors who transferred to a four-year college within their public university system. As they emphasize what actually takes place inside the college classroom, these accounts are particularly pertinent to the work of teacher educators.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is currently widespread agreement among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers involved in all aspects of teacher training that community colleges are a promising, but underutilized resource for diversifying the teaching force, bringing needed new teachers into the workforce, and improving teacher retention

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(Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Education Commission of the States, 2001; Locklear, Davis, & Covington, 2009; Shkodriani, 2004; Townsend, 2007; Townsend & Ignash, 2003). As awareness that community colleges can be an important source of solutions to these longstanding challenges has grown since the start of the new century, much research has focused upon policy and program design for community college teacher education, articulation and transfer to the four-year college. In addition, there has been extensive inquiry into the approaches states and local governing bodies do and ought to take to such issues as licensure, accreditation, recruitment, and funding (Center for Community College Policy, 2006; Education Commission of the States, 2001; Floyd, Skolnik, & Walker, 2005; Ignash & Slotnick, 2007; Shkodriani, 2004). This research has been enormously valuable in informing the creation of more effective legislation, policies, and programs that have enhanced the quality of community college teacher education and promoted successful coordination between two- and four-year colleges (Center for Community College Policy, 2006; Education Commission of the States, 2001; Locklear, Davis, & Covington, 2009; Townsend, 2007; Townsend & Ignash, 2003).

Missing from this knowledge base, however, has been the voices of the community college education students themselves. While data on enrollment, alignment, credentialing, and retention abound (e.g., Center for Community College Policy, 2006; Education Commission of the States, 2001; Evelyn, 2002; Floyd & Walker, 2003; Hudson, 2002; Shkodriani, 2004; Townsend & Ignash, 2003) students' own accounts of the factors that enhance or obstruct their training and transfer are rarely found in the literature. This is unfortunate, because students' perspectives add depth and detail to the emergent understanding of how community college teacher education, transfer, and articulation ought best be approached.

This article addresses this gap in the knowledge base by presenting the findings of an interview study conducted with twenty urban community college education majors who transferred, as juniors, to a four-year college within their public university system. These students' accounts provide a nuanced picture of the differences they perceive to exist between the course content and pedagogical approaches encountered at the two- and four-year college, and the challenges posed for them by the need to acclimate to those differences. As they emphasize what actually takes place inside the college classroom, these accounts are particularly pertinent to the work of teacher educators—a group whose role has not frequently been addressed in the literature

## BACKGROUND

Two-year colleges have long played an important role in teacher education. During the first half of the 20th century, many states required just two years of post-secondary education for teacher certification, so junior colleges were a common

training site for teachers. During the second half of the century, as the requirement that teachers obtain, at minimum, a bachelor's degree, became widespread, the community college became a first rather than a final step in the teacher accreditation process (Floyd & Walker, 2003; Townsend & Ignash, 2003).

Since the 1980s, an increasing number of aspiring teachers, especially single parents, working adults, and those from low-income backgrounds, have chosen to begin their college education at a community college (Shkodriani, 2004, p. 1). This social phenomenon has been the main impetus for states, cities, and public university systems to increasingly create articulation agreements. These are agreements between a two- and a four-year college that delineate just which community college credits will be accepted toward which four-year college requirements. Articulation agreements aim to smooth students' transition and help them avoid losing credits or taking unneeded courses (Shkodriani, 2004, p. 2).

In the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest public university system, there has long been institutional support and encouragement for the development of articulation agreements between specific institutions and programs. CUNY's overall policy on transfer is that all students receiving an Associate in Science (A.S.) degree at a community college are given priority for transfer and are guaranteed a place in one of the system's four-year colleges (CUNY TIPPS, 2008). Specific articulation agreements are left to individual institutions, departments, and programs. In the case of career programs, such as education, the policy is that, "...the senior college shall determine the proper level of placement in its professional course sequence and the extent to which such coursework can apply to the professional degree" (CUNY TIPPS, 2008). The senior college must, then, accept all 60 credits from the A.S. However, unless there is an articulation agreement in place, students can find themselves in a position where they have to take credits well beyond the 120 required for the bachelor's degree in order to fulfill the requirements of their major.

Undergraduate education majors often did find themselves in this unfortunate position throughout the early 1990s, at the four-year college studied here, a "top tier" CUNY located in the borough of Brooklyn. A majority of the college's Early Childhood Education majors and a substantial minority of its Elementary Education majors were (and still are) transfers from the two-year college studied here, one of six community colleges in the CUNY system and the only community college in Brooklyn. When those who had completed the two-year college's Early Childhood Education program arrived at the four-year college, they often found that many of the education courses they had taken did not have direct equivalents in their new program and so did not count toward any requirements for the major. This meant both that they had many, many courses left to take for their major and that they had to take credits well exceeding the 120 needed for the bachelor's degree in order to meet those major requirements.

In the mid 1990s, faculty and administration from both colleges began to meet in order to author an articulation agreement that would prevent these undesirable circumstances. While it has undergone some minor revisions since its creation, the agreement still stands today, in a form very close to its original one (see Appendix A). As an outcome of the agreement, the two-year college created a distinct A.S. program called Education Studies (see Appendix B), for those aiming to transfer to the four-year college upon graduation. Participants in this research are graduates of the Education Studies program, and are currently matriculating at the four-year college as Early Childhood or Elementary Education majors.

When I joined the education faculty of the two-year college in 2006, my program director and I noticed that it was hard to understand just how those who did transfer as part of the articulation agreement were doing. Anecdotes of both resounding success and substantial struggle abounded. We decided to investigate the experiences of the Education Studies graduates as they became Early Childhood or Elementary Education majors at the four-year college. Although we knew that about 60% of the Education Studies graduates did eventually obtain the bachelor's in education from the four-year college, we wanted to go beyond the numbers alone in order to construct a vivid picture of the specific successes and challenges encountered by our transfer students. My role in this inquiry primarily took the form of conducting in-depth interviews with the students. I believe that the perspectives offered here present a more personal, particular account of the undergraduate education major's transfer experience than could previously be found in the research.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study of twenty urban community college education majors who transferred to a four-year college as part of an articulation agreement between their undergraduate education programs. The primary source of data was in-depth, semistructured interviews. As Seidman describes the value of this methodology, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (1998, p. 3). As previously mentioned, I conducted this study because I felt that the absence of students' own perspectives on transfer marked a problematic omission in the literature. Interviewing was, therefore, the form of data collection optimally suited to the goals of this inquiry. It allowed me to hear at length, and from the students themselves, the story of their experiences and the meanings those experiences held for them.

## Sample Selection

Participation in this study was voluntary. Initially, I sought participation from students preparing to graduate from the two-year college in the spring of 2007. I visited each section of the course, Seminar and Practicum in Teacher Development; the last class students take before graduating from the Education Studies program, and verbally described the purposes and procedures of this research. At that time, I asked students interested in participating to provide me with their contact information. Of a total of 36 students in four sections of the class, 12 ultimately agreed to participate. As 12 did not seem like an adequate number to provide a well-rounded picture of diverse experiences, I then sent a letter to graduates of the Education Studies program, who had recently transferred to the four-year college's Early Childhood or Elementary Education programs, seeking their participation (see Appendix C). From a mailing of about 25 letters, eight additional students agreed to participate, bringing the total to 20. All participants received a \$50 gift card to the four-year college's bookstore in the summer of 2008.

While 20 is a small sample, the participants represent a wide range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. The youngest participant was 22 years old, the oldest 46. Six had immigrated to this country within the last ten years and eight spoke at least one language in addition to English. Their ethnic backgrounds included African Americans, Asian Americans, Caribbean Americans, Greek Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, Latino Americans, and Palestinian Americans. Although six males were approached to participate, none chose to do so. The sample, therefore, is exclusively female. Conducting a study similar to this one with male participants would undoubtedly yield intriguing results.

The participants represent a wide range of academic achievement levels, too. Ten graduated from the two-year college with a GPA of 3.5 or above. Of these ten, five still had at least a 3.5 after their second or third semester at the four-year college, three had between a 3.0 and a 3.4 and two had between a 2.5 and a 2.9. The remaining ten participants graduated from the two-year college with a GPA of between 2.75 and 3.4. Of these ten, five had a GPA between 2.0 and a 2.5 after their second or third semester at the four-year college and four had a GPA between 2.6 and 3.2. One student dropped below a 2.0 after her second semester and left the four-year college.

Regardless of their level of academic achievement, every participant described experiencing some cognitive dissonance upon encountering the unfamiliar norms and expectations of the four-year college. Nevertheless, at the time of this writing, all but one had either graduated from the education major or was continuing matriculation through it. This is in contrast to the 40% of transfer students from the two-year college's Education Studies program known to leave the four-year college without receiving the bachelor's degree. It may be, then, that because participation in this study was voluntary, it tended to attract individuals who possessed certain

personal characteristics, such as resilience and perseverance, in higher proportion than might be found in the general population of education students transferring between these two institutions. While it is not possible to ascertain for certain whether or not this was the case, there is no claim here that the perspectives presented are representative of those of all undergraduate education students or that the findings are generalizable to all teacher preparation programs. The aim is to offer a fine-grained depiction of one group of aspiring teachers' experiences in one urban university system in order to highlight the important ways in which students' own accounts can inform and enrich the ongoing conversation about optimum approaches to undergraduate teacher education in the 21st century.

## Data Collection

In depth, semistructured interviews were the primary form of data collection for this study. While I used an interview protocol (see Appendixes D1 and D2), I viewed this as a guide for identifying possible areas of inquiry, rather than as a strict sequence of questions that were always essential to ask. Marshall and Rossman's description of the nature of qualitative interviews is very reflective of my approach: "... qualitative interviews are much more like conversations than formal events ... The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants' views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses" (1999, p. 108). In the case of this study, I placed a very high value on gaining an understanding of what the participants themselves perceived to be the most salient aspects of their transfer and of how they thought about the community college experience as compared to the four-year college experience. For this reason, I generally began with an open-ended prompt such as, "Tell me about your experiences this semester." After hearing what the interviewee most wanted to say, I asked follow-up questions on specific topics, such as GPA or how well prepared they felt they were for coursework at the four-year college, if these had not been touched upon already.

Participants who graduated from the community college in the spring of 2007 were interviewed three times; in the summer of 2007 before they began at the four-year college, in the winter of 2007–2008, after they had completed their first semester there, and in June of 2008, after completing their second semester. Those who were already attending the four-year college when this study began were interviewed twice: usually after completing their first and second semesters. Two participants were completing their third and fourth semesters at the time of the interviews.

Interviews generally lasted 30–60 minutes and were audio taped. For the last interview in each series, I prepared an individual protocol based on my initial review and analysis of the preceding audiotapes (see Appendix D3 for an example). In this

instance, again, I referred to the protocol to a greater or lesser extent, depending upon the direction in which the participant took the conversation.

In addition to the interviews with the twenty students, I conducted an in-depth, audio taped interview with one member of the four-year college's Early Childhood Education faculty, whose class I observed as well. I had several informal conversations with professors and deans from the faculties of both colleges. These conversations included discussion of their perceptions of the purposes and goals for the articulation agreement, their observations of students' strengths and needs in the classroom and in college generally, and their own questions and concerns about the transfer and matriculation of the education majors.

Document analysis was another, secondary, source of data for this inquiry. I collected documents related to the specific articulation agreement as well as those outlining the particulars of the coursework and requirements for each of the programs involved. I also asked students to bring any syllabi, assignment guidelines, completed assignments, and transcripts they were willing to share with me to all of the interviews. These proved quite useful in lending clarity and specificity to students' accounts. I consulted them frequently both during the interviews themselves and during the many phases of data analysis.

## Data Analysis

As is appropriate for qualitative research, data collection and the first phases of analysis occurred simultaneously (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). A written transcript of each audio taped interview was created shortly after the interview was conducted. After the first round of interviews, I began to review these transcripts in order to create the first set of coding categories and to determine the direction and questions for the next round.

My process followed the constant comparative method. As described by Merriam, when utilizing this method, "The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident... These comparisons lead to tentative categories... Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated" (1998, p. 159). Along with concrete categories having to do with the courses students took, their ethnicity and academic background, thematic categories emerged as data collection progressed. Final coding categories included information about students' perceptions of the relevance, interest level and manageability of their coursework, their perspectives on the nature of the institutional culture at each college and their analysis of the helpfulness, clarity, and effectiveness of faculty.



## Researcher Positionality

I collected the data for this study during my second year as a member of the community college faculty. I have taken several steps throughout this research and writing process to ensure that my findings and conclusions are not skewed toward an unduly favorable view of community college practices. First, creating and analyzing the interview transcriptions meant repeatedly reviewing participants' own accounts of their experiences. The interpretations offered here are very much rooted in reference to those accounts. Second, I verbally conducted member checks throughout the many phases of data collection and analysis. I shared emergent theories and themes with the interviewees and rethought and revised any assertion they saw as unreflective of the point of view they had intended to convey.

While I did strive for the greatest objectivity possible, I also do hold to the belief that, in any human endeavor, "Personal experience shapes the lens with which we see" (Foote & Bartell, 2009, p. 7). In this regard, it was helpful that I came to the two-year college with long experience as an adjunct instructor in several master's degree teacher education programs. This allowed me to bring to this inquiry some firsthand understanding of the perspectives and experiences of students and faculty at various stages of teacher education, including but not limited to those teaching and learning at the two-year college.

## FINDINGS

Despite substantial differences in their ages, ethnicities, and levels of academic achievement, participants' accounts of their transfer were often remarkably similar. In general, learning experiences that emphasized the experiential, the practical, and the interactive were more readily viewed as useful, interesting, and manageable than were experiences that emphasized the textual, the scholarly, and the theoretical. Overall, the two-year college was associated with the former, more accessible emphasis while the four-year college was associated with the latter, more challenging one. Related to this theme of a perceived tension between real world and textual knowledge, students described faculty at the two- and four-year college as ascribing very different roles for themselves when it came to scaffolding students' following of the syllabus, locating scholarship needed for written assignments and assisting with the construction of a personal analysis and interpretation of assigned readings.

### "It seemed like you were supposed to know it already": Perceptions of Contrasts in the Role of Faculty

While almost every participant stated that they had anticipated the increased academic demands and less "homey" atmosphere encountered at the four-year



college, almost all were surprised and challenged by the degree of independence expected from them when it came to following course syllabi and locating resources for and writing research papers. They described feeling, during the first semester in particular, confused, inadequate, and inept. Many failed required classes or were temporarily barred from continuing to take education courses because their GPA had dropped below the requisite 2.5.

Adjusting to the expectations of the four-year college faculty about how the syllabus was to be utilized was one especially frequently cited source of confusion and concern. While in the four-year college, the syllabus was seen by faculty as the primary source students were to consult for understanding course requirements and personal communication was situated as a secondary source, at the community college it was the other way around – although syllabi were distributed, faculty rarely referred to them directly or expected that students would. Instead, lots of time was spent in class, during office hours and by email, providing students with highly specified, often individualized explanations and clarifications about class requirements.

When students arrived at the four-year college, they struggled with the degree of independence expected. One high achieving student, for example, told of the professor in her language development course expressing dismay when just a small segment of the class handed in the first paper on time. “No one did it because no one knew it was due,” the student explained. As often occurred, the professor assumed the students were consulting the syllabus to keep track of assignments, while the students assumed the professor would verbally flag for them upcoming due dates and personally present them with a detailed explanation of expectations for each assignment beforehand.

The extent to which the syllabus could operate as a standalone document for successfully meeting course requirements, and the extent to which it needed to be scaffolded by faculty explanation and examples was frequently cited by students as an area in which their own perspectives differed substantially from that of many of the four-year college faculty’s. For example, as Chanie (all names used here are pseudonyms), a 38-year-old mother of seven, who had graduated from the community college with honors and had a 3.8 GPA at the end of her first year at the four-year college, described her experience:

I couldn’t figure it out. I didn’t understand what the professor wanted. Over there [the four-year college], the professors expect from you to know how to do it more on your own. They give you a syllabus, usually it’s like a detailed syllabus and you’re supposed to understand how to do it from the syllabus. If you have a question, they would explain it to you, but most of the time they want you to know how to do it already. You’re supposed to be at a level where you already learned how to do this somewhere else.

Almost every participant mentioned having this sense that the four-year college professors assumed a level of prior knowledge and expertise about academic protocols and procedures that they did not yet possess. This was especially true of following syllabus guidelines for papers and projects that involved integrating peer-reviewed research and assigned readings. As Delia, a struggling 46-year-old student, who graduated from the two-year college with a 2.5 GPA, but had a 1.9 after two semesters at the four-year college, recounted:

It seemed like the professor had a lot of stuff for us to do but we didn't have enough background to get it done. You had to research it yourself and dig up the books. This last project, I had to do a case study of a child, write up what the child needs, recommendations and all that kind of stuff and we hadn't talked about that a lot in class to be able to produce something like that. So it was really a struggle. She like said, "It's in the textbook, you have to dig it up ..." She gave us a checklist, she gave us an outline, but we didn't talk about how to do this. ... I guess they expect since you're at this level, you should have it from last time or something.

Delia contrasts this experience with her community college professor's approach to preparing the class for writing up an observation of a child. "She put examples up on the wall, she walked us through it step-by-step, what this chapter would be about and just what we should do. It was more hands-on, more one-on-one, to help you produce it."

Chanie and Delia's comments highlight two aspects of the community college approach that differed greatly from the four-year college approach and that made transition difficult. First, community college faculty broke information down much more for students and much more extensively provided them with specific formats and resources for completing assignments. Second, at the community college, students were rarely asked to integrate readings or research into papers or presentations. Instead, short papers, mostly focused upon description of empirical experiences – either from fieldwork or from personal life – were the norm. Students arrived at the four-year college, then, with very limited experience of incorporating the written work of others into their own writing. When they were handed a syllabus that required them to do so, they had little understanding of how to undertake such a process.

### "I broke my brain on those articles": Perceptions of Contrasts in the Role of Readings

Along with struggling with an understanding of the process by which research was to be integrated into writing, many students also struggled with grasping the content of assigned readings and with understanding why readings needed to play such

a central role in the curriculum at the four-year college. In general, the community college coursework emphasized the experiential or what the students called “hands-on” “actual what you’re gonna do with the kids” and “the real deal.” The four-year college, on the other hand, emphasized the textual, or, what students referred to as, “off a book” “read, read, read, write, write, write” and “learning from papers, not people.”

At the community college, assigned readings were not cited as playing a major role in class discussions, group work or written assignments. This was true of courses across disciplines, but particularly true of education classes. In all disciplines, students described their community college classes as mostly focused upon open-ended discussions and sharing of anecdotes about real-life experiences. In the case of their education courses specifically, the actual enactment of such activities as baking, painting, block building, and reading aloud was emphasized. Participants viewed such activities as engaging, accessible, and highly pertinent to their professional preparation.

In contrast, while the four-year college’s education classes were certainly not devoid of attention to the practical application of ideas, a much greater emphasis was placed upon attention to texts. Along with the requirement that research be integrated into papers and presentations, whole and small group class discussions often focused upon specific questions, provided by faculty, related to the assigned readings. Penelope, a 23-year-old student who was barred from taking education courses during her second semester at the four-year college because of low GPA, but completed the third semester with a 2.7, describes the role of readings in her four-year college education courses:

Honestly, [in the two-year college], I don’t remember reading that much. Here what they do is, they make sure that you read, cause when you come back to class, they will, like, they look at you ... The professor will say, “Let’s look at our reading.” She’ll start discussing it and she’ll ask questions and they’re very big on answering. You know if you’re like one of those people that don’t talk, they notice it. They want you to participate. Participate is huge, here. You have to participate; it’s a big part of the grade. You can’t participate if you don’t know what you read.

In students’ accounts, this unfamiliar role of assigned readings often caused problems for them. This was the case both because they were unaccustomed to being held accountable for having done the readings and also because when community college faculty did address assigned readings in class, they usually gave what students referred to as “notes”: a summary on the blackboard of what the faculty member considered to be the key ideas from the text. This was accompanied by a verbal review of those key ideas. Four-year college faculty, on the other hand, assumed students would come to class having done the reading and some

in-the-head synthesis and analysis of its content. Rather than reviewing the reading in class, they would pose open-ended questions based on the reading for small and whole group consideration, such as “What’s the author’s purpose here?” “What did you think was important?” “Compare two authors. What’s one’s point of view? What’s the other’s? In what ways do they agree or disagree?” A much higher degree of independence was expected at the four-year college, then, with regard to both actually doing the readings and with constructing a personal response to and interpretation of what had been read.

The comments of Olive, a 26-year old student who graduated from the community college with a 3.5 GPA, but had to repeat the reading methods class she took her first semester at the senior college because she received a D, highlight the contrast in the two institution’s approaches. Below, she describes why she thinks she initially encountered the problems she did at the four-year college:

A lot of the stuff is from the book. I didn’t go over some stuff last semester and that’s why I didn’t do that well. I think with that class you really have to read the book, or else you’re lost. ... The professors I had [at the two-year college], they went over a lot and notes were given. It wasn’t just like, “Alright we’re just gonna talk about the reading, we’re not gonna go over it,” like it is here. I think at times you just get lazy, you tell yourself, “Okay I think I can do this, I don’t really have to read.” I think that’s what I kinda did my first semester.

Olive reports that the second time she took the class, she consistently read and took notes on the readings beforehand. She received a B from the same professor she had received the D from the semester before.

Many participants reported similar instances, in which they had to “learn the hard way” that if they didn’t do the reading they probably wouldn’t pass the class. Many also described being surprised that for the four-year college exams, “You’re responsible for the book on your own” whereas at the community college, faculty “actually point out exactly what to focus on.” While by their second or third semester, almost everybody was aware of the greater extent to which doing the readings would improve their grades and their understanding of course material, divergent perspectives began to emerge about how valuable the emphasis on reading was for their learning.

Those who did come to think it was worthwhile cited instances in which the linkage to actual teaching practice was made very explicit. Olive, for example, referencing a four-year college course on infant and toddler development, describes the kinds of class discussions, linked to the readings, which she had come to see as of value:

She’d [the professor] always refer it back to children to see what they would do because as teachers you always refer it back to your class. I think that always helps, too, because a lot of questions would be

like, “What would you do if you had a child that had listening problems?” You know, “How can you make it more effective?” “How can you incorporate reading to somebody in a different language?” Things like that. So I think always referring it back to children made it easier to understand.

While Olive and several others began to see the readings as one resource for useful information and ideas about their future teaching role, others continued to see the experiential and the textual as quite dichotomized. For example, Ava, a second semester student with a 2.0 GPA, commented:

At [the two-year college], it was more of actual what you’re gonna do with the kids, like the reading them the books, teaching them the music. I took the art class, you know the student teaching, it was more about actually teaching young children instead of all this information they’re throwing at us now.

In a similar vein, LaToya, a third semester student with a 3.75 GPA, observed of the two-year college:

Even though it was less work, I learned more because it was a lot of discussion, a lot of feedback, what’s to be expected when you become a teacher. So, even though it wasn’t written work, what was told to us verbally was more helpful.

Many students described returning to their more accessible class notes and handouts from the community college in order to plan their fieldwork lessons or to study for tests at the four-year college.

## IMPLICATIONS

These participants paint a picture of a transition characterized not by a smooth segue from one set of institutional expectations to another but by a stark switch in pedagogical norms and practices. This stark switch is shown to have adverse effects as some students receive failing grades, are forced to repeat classes, or have to halt their progression through the major until their GPA improves.

It is certainly not the aim of this research to assert that the emphasis of either institution is more desirable or beneficial to aspiring teachers than the other. (In fact, most would likely agree that teacher candidates probably benefit best from a good blend of experiential and textual learning experiences.) It does aim to flag the need for greater attention to issues of pedagogy and practice on the part of teacher educators and researchers, in order to smooth transfer and help as many students as possible succeed. Along with all the talk that already occurs about such programmatic issues as equivalency, accreditation, and credentialing, these students’ stories highlight the desirability of increasing institutional conversations about

the pedagogical norms students will meet up with at each institution. Further, in cases like this one, in which a significant source of students' problems had to do with moving from classrooms that emphasized the experiential to classrooms that emphasized the textual, it is worth exploring some particular practices and approaches likely to make transition and matriculation smoother and more successful.

### Implications for Two-year College Pedagogy and Practice: Building a Bridge from the Experiential to the Textual

Through numerous informal conversations with community college colleagues I know that many community college faculty are reluctant to place greater textual demands on students because they know that reading and writing are often not the modalities in which their students feel most comfortable or competent. These faculty members place a high value on constructing learning experiences that will allow two-year college students to feel successful and engaged. The findings of this study support their position that building students' confidence is a crucial dimension of the community college mission. Numerous participants mentioned that they never would have gone on to the four-year college had they not first had the opportunity the community college provided them with to feel successful in the classroom and to bolster their notion of themselves as individuals who could do well in a higher educational setting.

At the same time, the more varied, complex literacies demanded of all citizens in our contemporary technological society are well documented (Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1994; Kellner, n.d.; Treffinger, 2008). This is certainly true for teachers and all early childhood and elementary education professionals, who now, invariably, meet up in their workplaces with an array of mandated assessments, local, state, and national standards documents, prescribed curricula and forms for accountability and reporting out. Whether or not they choose to go on to a four-year college, it is essential that those entering the profession have the skills and capacities necessary to comprehend such texts and to critically analyze their source and purpose. Additionally, the work of those in all education related roles is clearly enriched when they have the desire and the ability to consult professional books and electronic and print journals and periodicals in order to learn about current theories and practices under consideration in the field.

Since the data for this study was collected, my colleagues and I have been looking to the scholarship, often authored by community college faculty, on pedagogical strategies that can bolster these needed critical reading skills (e.g., McAghon, 1996; Reed & Peirce, 2004; Zachery & Wright, 2004). One approach we have been exploring is called "seminaring." In the context of undergraduate education, the term "seminaring" is used to mean a, "focused, collaborative group



discussion of a text” (Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, n.d., p. 1). To prepare for the seminar, students read the text and do some writing beforehand about the author’s essential points and purposes as well as about the questions and personal responses the text generates for them (Hamish, 1995, p. 2). During the seminar, the teacher may provide “a model of an experienced learner” but to the greatest extent possible, lets the students determine the particular direction and emphasis of the discussion, so long as it stays rooted in reference to the text (Hamish, 1995, p. 2).

In our Education Studies program, we have begun to conduct some seminars utilizing articles from contemporary professional periodicals that include current theory and research, but also offer strong links to classroom practice and real-world schooling (see, for example, Morgan, 2009; Neuman, 2006; Ogu & Schmidt, 2009). By having students read and take notes on the articles ahead of time and by integrating regular discussion of them into class sessions, we have expanded the opportunities the students have to engage from the outset in the sorts of textual explorations they found so off-putting when they arrived at the four-year college. These include identifying the author’s main points and purposes, synthesizing ideas within a single text and across multiple texts, and formulating a personal response grounded in an understanding of the author’s assertions. Because of the nature of the particular readings and the pedagogical approach we have chosen, students have the opportunity to improve their critical reading skills, while still expanding their practical knowledge of “actual what you’re gonna do with the kids,” as they so desire to do, and learning in the modality they so prefer, of lively, social, interactive processes.

The seminar, then, is one example of a teaching practice that allows faculty to construct coursework that bridges the experiential and the textual. These findings indicate that two-year college students would be well served if such bridges were to also be built in the areas of locating peer-reviewed research and making active use of the syllabus. As these academic undertakings were found to be so challenging for students when they arrived at the four-year college, two-year faculty might do well to introduce them, at least in some rudimentary form, before the increased expectations of the bachelor’s program are encountered.

As concerns locating peer-reviewed research pertinent to a particular topic, two-year college instructors can demonstrate how to approach this process in a library or computer lab, then let small groups of students select a topic of interest, and attempt the process for themselves, with assistance from the librarian and/or faculty member. As concerns the syllabus, community college faculty can walk students through its contents early on, then model throughout the semester the ways in which they themselves consult it for information about dates, deadlines, and course expectations. When questions are asked, the answers to which are contained in the syllabus, faculty can put structures, such as peer support groups, in place, so that students can help one another find the information they need, rather than simply, passively, receiving it from the teacher.



Although further study would be needed on the effectiveness of these strategies, such collaborative, constructivist techniques would seem to offer a promising means of bridging what many two-year college education students know already and can do comfortably with what they need to know and be able to do in order to develop further as learners and as education professionals. Were community college education faculty who do not do so already to incorporate some of these interactive, student-centered approaches to reading and research into their classes, education students might come to be more competent and confident with textual engagement and analysis as an integral part of classroom life, while continuing to find their classes manageable, enjoyable, and pertinent to their professional preparation.

### Implications for Four-Year College Pedagogy and Practice: Building a Bridge from the Known to the New

In conversations with four-year college faculty, one perspective frequently voiced was that college students in their junior year ought to already know how to independently undertake such academic endeavors as following a syllabus, locating peer-reviewed research related to a particular topic, and identifying and analyzing the important ideas in assigned readings. Such expectations are understandable and, as has been discussed above, it would certainly be beneficial to integrate such endeavors more fully into community college coursework. In instances in which this has not taken place, however, it is important to consider the ways in which four-year college faculty can assist students in acquiring these essential capacities.

Across a multitude of disciplines, including curriculum and learning theory (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Biggs, 1999; Stage, Muller, & Simmons, 1998), cognitive psychology (Raymond, 2000; Rogoff, 1990), and neuroscience (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Zull, 2002), there is more and more evidence in support of the fundamental tenet that, in order for learners at all levels and in all contexts to learn well, the teacher must, "... pay careful attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs the learner brings to the educational setting" (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 190). In other words, the teacher must take a "learner-centered" approach, deciding what to teach and how and when to teach it by melding a vision of the body of content essential to the course with insight into the prior knowledge and capacities of the student. From students' accounts in these interviews, it is clear that often what was taught and the degree of independence that was expected in mastering it at the four-year college lay beyond what the students could succeed at absent further "scaffolding" from faculty, that is, the support structures a teacher must provide in order for the learner to progress to the next stage or level (Raymond, 2000).

Some recently authored texts on higher education teaching methods offer suggestions for ways in which such scaffolds can be integrated into college coursework without trivializing or compromising class content. Nilson, for example,

describes how to structure small group discussion and question and answer sessions focused upon exploration of the syllabus (2003, p. 34). Jones suggests requiring students to write a brief reaction paper to the syllabus or using a brief quiz to insure that it's content is well attended to (2001, p. 1). Barkley, Cross, and Major offer a collaborative learning technique called "Group Investigation" that helps students to master research methodologies by allowing them to work in teams as they "plan, conduct, and report on an in-depth research project" (2005, p. 199).

As concerns developing more sophisticated strategies for making meaning of texts, the seminar approach described in the previous section is certainly appropriate for four- as well as two-year college settings. Other techniques aimed at the development of such strategies include "Learning Cell" in which pairs of students "individually develop questions about a reading", then take turns answering and asking one another's questions (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005, p. 140) and "Analytic Teams" in which each student in a group is assigned a role, such as "Proponent" or "Example Giver", that helps them focus upon one crucial aspect of the critical reading process (Barkley et al., 2005, p. 193).

Further research on the efficacy of these approaches for education students' learning is clearly warranted. They do seem to hold the potential, though, to provide students with the peer and faculty support many need in order to meet the intellectual and behavioral demands of a bachelor's degree program, while allowing for the maintenance of the rigor and depth appropriate to the four-year setting.

## CONCLUSION

The aspiring teachers in this study describe encountering dramatically different pedagogical approaches to course content and starkly contrasting faculty expectations about their roles and responsibilities upon transfer from a two- to a four-year college within their urban university system. In this study, I have depicted some ways in which the textual and the experiential, which the students experienced as quite separate dimensions of their professional preparation, might become more melded across institutions, so that a smoother, less unsettling transition, filled with fewer setbacks, can be had. First, I have described some specific ways in which such textual tasks as analyzing and interpreting assigned readings, identifying research relevant to a topic of study, and utilizing the syllabus as an essential source of information for a college course might be introduced into two-year college classes through approaches that both acknowledge and extend students' established cognitive strengths and academic abilities. As concerns the four-year college, I have depicted some methods that allow faculty to scaffold students' acquisition of the competencies they need to meet the increased intellectual expectations of a bachelor's program, while honoring their proclivity towards socially oriented learning experiences and scholarship that includes attention to the actual enactment of theory.

Community colleges education students are known to be a vital source for the ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse teaching force required to meet the learning needs of young children in 21st century America. The recommendations about pedagogical approaches made here are aimed at adding to the understandings of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers about how to nurture these students' capacities, how to help them succeed academically, and how to increase the likelihood that they will persist and obtain the credentials that will allow them to join the teaching force. My hope is that by calling attention to the important implications for teaching practice these students' accounts embed, consideration of what takes place inside the college classroom will come to be more extensively attended to by those involved in transfer and articulation for undergraduate teacher education. I believe this study flags the fact that such increased attention is essential if promising, committed students like these are to meet up with conditions most conducive to their becoming effective, knowledgeable, long-serving teachers.

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## APPENDIX A

## EXCERPT FROM ARTICULATION AGREEMENT

## Course to Course Equivalencies and Transfer Credit Awarded

<i><b>Kingsborough Community College</b></i> <b>Course and Title</b>	<b><u>Credits</u></b>	<b><u>Brooklyn College</u></b> <b><u>Equivalent</u></b> <b><u>(or other evaluation)</u></b>	<b><u>Transfer</u></b> <b><u>Credit</u></b> <b><u>Granted</u></b>
General Education and Core Studies Courses			
ENG 12, Freshman English I	4	Block credit	4
ENG24, Freshman English II	3	Block credit	3
HPE12, Foundations in Health	3	HNS 6.1	3
Any History Course	3	Block credit	3
Any Non-studio Art or Music Course	3	Block credit	3
MAT 7, Principles of Mathematics	4	Elective	4
SOC 31, Introduction to Sociology	3		6
+ any Political Science Course	3	Block credit	
SCI 34, Introduction to Modern Chemistry or SCI 35, Introduction to Modern Physics or BIO33, Concepts of Biology	4	Block credit	4
EPS 31, 32, 33, 36, 38 or SCI 37 or SCI 25 or SCI 51 with Lab	4	General Science 9.1 or General Science 9.3 or General Science 9.5	3
*Liberal Arts Elective from Groups I-V	3	Elective	3
		SUBTOTAL	36

## Requirements of the Major/ Pedagogical Core

EDC 20, Foundations of Education	3	EDUC 16	3
HUM 81, Developing Literacy in Children	1		0
EDC 21, Social Science in Education (PSY 24, Psych. Disorders/Young Children)	3	EDUC 36.1 (+ PSY 24.5 )	3
EDC 22, Art Workshop in Education + EDC 23, Music & Movement in Ed. + EDC 90, Practicum in Teacher Dev.	2 2 3	EDUC 43.1 + EDUC 34	6
		SUBTOTAL	12

The following required courses transfer as the Brooklyn College course equivalency noted. In addition, 6 credits can count towards the psychology major/concentration offered at Brooklyn College.

PSY 11, General Psychology	3	PSY 1.1	3
PSY 32, Human Growth & Development	3	PSY 20	3
PSY 24, Psych. Disorders/ Young Children	3	PSY 24.5	3
		SUBTOTAL	9

### Electives

Credit remaining from course equivalent to General Science	9	Blanket Elective credit	1
HUM 81		Blanket Elective credit	1
Credit remaining from courses equivalent to EDUC 43.1 + EDUC 34		Blanket Elective credit	1
		A.S. TOTAL	60

### Brooklyn College Courses Remaining for the B.A. Degree

#### General Education (Liberal Arts, Core, Distribution) and Other Required Courses

Course and Title:	Credits
Two upper tier Core Studies courses (to be determined)	6
Mathematics 1.95	4
Modern Language, if necessary	0-8
One credit elective	1
	Subtotal: 11-19

#### ***Requirements of the Major/Pedagogical Core***

Educ. 37.11 Dev. of Language & Literacy in Young Children	3
Speech 12 Survey of Speech, Language and Hearing Disorders	3
Educ. 39 Early Childhood & Care of Infants & Toddlers	2
Educ. 40.1 Literacy Teaching & Learning in Early Childhood	3
Educ. 44.1 Teaching Mathematics in the Early Years	2
Math 1.97 Mathematics in Education	2
Educ. 45.1 Science Inquiry for Young Children	2
General Science 20 Natural Science in Early Childhood and Childhood Education	2

*In order to register for student teaching, students must have a minimum overall GPA of 2.75 and a cumulative GPA of 3.00 or better in education courses*

Educ. 74 Seminar & Comprehensive Student Teaching I	9
	Subtotal: 28



For Dual Certification only:

<u>Educ. 51.11 Foundations &amp; Pedagogy in Early Childhood Special Education</u>	3
<u>Educ 51.12 Environments &amp; Curriculum Adaptation for Young Learners</u>	
<u>With Special Needs</u>	3

Psychology concentration for the major\*\* (plus 9 credits from KCC, see p. 2)

Subtotal: 21

All other concentrations

63–80

\*\* A liberal arts concentration of 30 credits is required as part of the B.A. program in Early Childhood Education Teacher.

## APPENDIX B OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION STUDIES SEQUENCE

### KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

#### ***\*A.S. EDUCATION STUDIES (CODE 45)***

This program is jointly registered with Brooklyn College's B.A. in Early Childhood Education. To satisfy Brooklyn Core Equivalencies, courses must be carefully selected with an Education Studies Faculty Advisor.

Requirements for Matriculants

Total credits: 60

#### COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS

Successful completion of COMPASS Math Skills Test and the CUNY ACT in Reading and Writing scores or developmental courses may be required.

ENG 12	4
ENG 24	3
HPE 12	3

#### DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS §

* +Foundations of Education (EDC 02000)	3
* +Art Workshop in Education (EDC 02200)	2
* +Music & Movement Workshop in Education (EDC 02300)	2
+Practicum in Teacher Development 1 (EDC 090A4)	3
General Psychology (PSY 01100)	3
Psychological Disorders in Children (PSY 02400)	3
Human Growth and Development (PSY 03200)	3
Introduction to Sociology (SOC 03100)	3
* +Development of Literacy in Children (HUM 08181)	1

#### Concentration in Early Childhood Education (Birth – 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade)

* +Social Sciences in Education (EDC 02100)	3
Liberal Arts (Groups I–V) Electives	3

Concentration in Childhood Education (1<sup>st</sup>– 6<sup>th</sup> Grade)

Social Science in Childhood Education (EDC 03100) 3

Urban Sociology (SOC 03200) 3

**GROUP REQUIREMENTS \*\*21 CREDITS**

I. Any non-studio Art or Music course 3

III. Social Sciences (choose one from each area) 6  
History – Political ScienceIV. Behavioral Sciences - **Satisfied by Department requirements**  
Anthropology – Psychology – SociologyV. Mathematics and Sciences 12  
MAT 00700**Plus** choice of SCI 03400 or BIO 03300**Plus** choice of EPS 03100 or 03200 or 03300 or 03600 or 03800 or SCI  
02500 or SCI 03700SEQUENCE OF COURSES**1<sup>st</sup> Semester EDC 20****2<sup>nd</sup> Semester EDC 21 (co-requisite – history or political  
science course)****3<sup>rd</sup> Semester EDC 90 and EDC 22 (co/pre-requisite – PSY 32)****ELECTIVES- TO BE CHOSEN FROM GROUPS I THROUGH V TO  
MAKE 60 CREDITS**

• This program is within the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Human Services.

\* These courses must have a grade of “C” or better to continue to the next level

+ These courses may not be taken more than two times

^ This course must be taken before EDC 90.

# This course may be taken any time after taking EDC 20

**APPENDIX C****LETTER TO KCC GRADUATES SEEKING PARTICIPATION****KINGSBOROUGH***Early Childhood Education**Dr. Barbara Weiserbs, Director*

June 8th, 2007

Dear Former Kingsborough Education Studies Student,

I am writing to seek your participation in a study being conducted about education students' transfer from Kingsborough to Brooklyn College.

Professor Weiserbs and I are studying this topic so that programs can be designed that will allow transfer students to have the best possible educational experience.

I would like to interview you about your transfer experience. I would like to interview you once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. After the second interview, all participants will receive a **\$50 gift certificate to the Brooklyn College Bookstore**. All interviews are completely anonymous and confidential. They take about a half an hour. I would like to interview you *even if* you have left Brooklyn College or are no longer an education major.

If you are willing to participate, please fill out the enclosed form and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Then, I will get back to you with a specific appointment.

Participation in this project will give you the opportunity to make your voice heard in research about teacher education, to influence program design and to help future students. I very much hope that you will consider participating.

Please feel free to contact me at the telephone number or email address below should you have any questions or concerns.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

(Name, title and contact information  
withheld for blind review)

## APPENDIX D1

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH NEW KBCC GRADUATES

1. Tell me about why you are going to Brooklyn College:
  - a. What are your career and academic goals?
  - b. What kinds of experiences do you hope to have there?
2. How would you describe your feelings in relation to transferring to Brooklyn?
3. Do you know students who are currently attending BC?
  - a. If yes, what have they told you?
  - b. How does that information make you feel about attending BC?
4. In what ways do you imagine Brooklyn will be the same as and different from Kingsborough?
5. What classes are you taking in the fall (if already know)?
6. Do you intend to approach anything differently as a student at BC than you did at Kingsborough?
7. How much time do you imagine putting into your coursework outside of class time?
  - a. When and where do you plan to do this work?
8. How would you describe your strengths and weaknesses as a student?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?

## APPENDIX D2

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH KCC GRADUATES ATTENDING BROOKLYN COLLEGE

1. Tell me about your experiences at Brooklyn College:
  - a. What is going well for you?
  - b. What is challenging?
  - c. What is the same/different from KBCC?
2. What classes are you taking?
  - a. Can you describe a typical class session?
  - b. Can you describe some of your assignments?
3. What is your GPA?
4. Do you feel you were well prepared for your coursework here?
5. What do you plan to take next semester?
6. Are there things about Kingsborough you now wish had been approached differently?
7. Are there ways in which you think one school ought to be more like the other?
8. Have you taken any of the state certification exams?
  - a. If so, which ones?
  - b. How did you do?
  - c. Did you feel were well prepared?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?

## APPENDIX D3

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FINAL INTERVIEW WITH NORA

1. How have things gone for you this semester? (if needed, refer to list of specific classes registered for this semester – EDUC 38, EDUC 40, FREN 2, SOC 18)
2. What grades did you get?
3. What concentration did you choose?
4. Last semester, you talked about sometimes experiencing a lack of clarity about professors' expectations for some assignments. How has that gone for you this semester?
5. You also described some professors and staff as being unhelpful and/or unfriendly. Have you had a similar or different sort of experience this semester?
6. You said you might not be inclined to participate in class discussions so much this semester. How did that turn out?
7. You also discussed having difficulty finding articles for your paper for your EDUC 37 class. Have you had other assignments this semester that required you to find and discuss research articles? If so, how did that go for you?
8. What will you take in the summer and fall?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?